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SIPDIS

AIDAC
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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, AND ALSO PASS USAID/W
USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AF/EA, DCHA
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA, USAID/REDSO, AND FAS
USMISSION UN ROME
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NAIROBI FOR SFO
NSC FOR JMELINE, NSC/AFRICA FOR SHORTLEY
USUN FOR TMALY
BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: EAID PREF PGOV PHUM SOCI KAWC SU
SUBJECT: West Darfur - Assaults Targeting Aid Agencies
Intensify

Summary

¶1. (U) Over the past several weeks, a spate of attacks
targeting aid agencies in West Darfur has left a number
of non-government organizations (NGOs) searching for
options to counter the region's mounting security
threats. Even before these recent attacks, humanitarian
emergency relief programs were limited by the lawlessness
that grips much of the state. Over the past month, armed
individuals abducted NGO staff and vehicles, forcibly
entered aid agency compounds in search of cash and
commodities, and physically attacked humanitarian
workers. Most alarming to the U.N. and NGOs are the
assaults that have take place in broad daylight in the
West Darfur State capital of El Geneina. Relief agencies
have brought their concerns to the governor of West
Darfur and the police chief in El Geneina hoping to see
an improvement in security provided by local officials.
However, some agencies are prepared to consider
suspending their operations in El Geneina and other parts
of West Darfur if the rash of attacks against the
humanitarian community does not cease. Aid agencies fear
that unless the situation is brought under control soon,
it is only a matter of time before staff are seriously
injured or killed during an violent criminal act. End
Summary.

Assaults on Aid Agencies on the Rise

¶2. (U) The past four weeks have witnessed a surge in
attacks targeting humanitarian agencies in West Darfur.
Although security for aid agencies has been a long-
running problem in parts of West Darfur, the frequency of
aggression towards aid groups in and near the city of El
Geneina has surged since mid-April. A new twist is the
willingness and ability of armed groups to target aid
groups during daylight hours in or near El Geneina where,
in theory, Sudan's Government of National Unity (GNU)
maintains a strong security apparatus. The ease with
which armed elements can force their way into aid agency
compounds or carry out carjackings in the middle of the

city in broad daylight alarms international humanitarian
organizations working in the area.

¶3. (U) On April 16 at 0200, three armed men wearing
military uniforms entered a compound in El Geneina where
the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) parks
some of its vehicles. The ICRC guards thwarted the
attempted theft of vehicles by alerting other staff
members of the attack via radio. The bandits fled after
hearing the alert.

¶4. (U) On April 18 at 1540, a group of armed men ambushed
a convoy of four vehicles belonging to Catholic Relief
Services (CRS) on a road 8 km north of El Geneina. They
successfully stopped the first CRS vehicle in the convoy,
but drivers in the other three vehicles witnessed the
attack and managed to escape. The gunmen forced CRS
staff to drive a great distance north of El Geneina where
they then evicted the CRS personnel from the vehicle,
abandoning them far from any major population center.
The CRS staff made their way to a nearby town where they
were assisted by African Union troops to return to safely
to El Geneina.

¶5. (U) On April 19 at 0400 in El Geneina, six armed men
in police uniforms forced their way into the residence of
a security guard employed by the UN and stole a number of
valuables.

¶6. (U) On April 20 at 2020 in El Geneina, five armed men
allegedly in uniforms indicative of membership in the
Popular Defense Force (PDF) carjacked a vehicle belong to
the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP). They forced the
driver from the vehicle at gunpoint and made off with the
car.

¶7. (U) On April 28 at 1320 in El Geneina, armed robbers
forced their way into the compound belonging to the
Italian NGO COSV. They first threatened and then beat
staff demanding that they turn over all cash and
valuables in the office. This incident particularly
disturbed the humanitarian community as it took place
during the middle of the day.

¶8. (U) On May 2 at 1330 at Ardamata camp for internally
displaced persons (IDPs) at the edge of El Geneina, seven
gunmen (four in military uniforms) ambushed a vehicle
belonging to Save the Children-U.S. (SC-US). They forced
their way into the vehicle with three SC-US staff still
inside and drove away from the city. After traveling for
approximately 62 km, the gunmen forced the SC-US staff
out of the vehicle after robbing them of all
communication gear, cash, and other valuables. The SC-US
employees returned safely to El Geneina after a long
journey on foot and by donkey cart.

Reaction to the Latest Wave of Attacks

¶9. (SBU) The U.N. and NGOs have only been able to
speculate on the identity and motives of the gunmen
perpetrating these attacks on the humanitarian community.
Groups that are likely involved include: Chadian
opposition fighters, Arab militias, Darfurian rebels,
ordinary bandits, and government soldiers and security
personnel. Certainly the volatility, instability, and
lawlessness of the border area between Darfur and Chad
contributes to an environment where all of these groups
can operate without impunity. The continuing demands of
conflict require regular inputs of cash, vehicles, and
communications gear which are often relatively easily
obtained from aid agencies working in the area.

¶10. (U) Aid agencies recently met with the chief of police in El Geneina and the chief of the government's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) for West Darfur. Some agencies warned the authorities in El Geneina that they would withdraw their staff and suspend programs in the greater El Geneina area if security conditions continued to degenerate. In response to concerns of the humanitarian groups, the police in El Geneina scheduled more patrols and established additional static checkpoints around the city.

¶11. (U) NGOs presented this issue to U.N. Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland during his visit to Darfur on May 8. (Note: During a May 9 donor briefing - covered septel - Egeland stated that eight of 25 serious security events in Darfur involving the U.N. and NGOs in the past month had occurred in El Geneina town. End note.) Relief organizations working in West Darfur also debriefed U.N. Special Representative to the Secretary General for Sudan Jan Pronk and the donor

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community, seeking support in efforts to pressure the government to enhance security in El Geneina.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Violence targeted at international relief agencies in West Darfur is nothing new. Most of northern West Darfur has been inaccessible to U.N. agencies and NGOs since late 2005 due to violence or potential for violence. However, the recent increase in attacks against relief agencies in El Geneina and surrounding areas has alarmed NGOs, especially since the assailants have proven themselves able to commit violent offenses against aid agencies in the middle of the city during daytime hours. Several NGOs stated their readiness to suspend operations in El Geneina if local authorities fail to react to this problem and put effective measures in place to reduce the threat posed by criminal activity in West Darfur. Maintenance of a relatively secure

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environment where aid agencies can implement their programs in support of war-affected populations is certainly within the best interest of state and local government authorities. If significant numbers of aid agencies suspend humanitarian operations in West Darfur, local officials lack the necessary capacity to provide essential services to the state's large conflict-affected population.

HUME